

## GETTING TO KNOW YOU

## George W. Gill

*Q#1: Date and Place of birth:*

Sterling, Kansas, June 28, 1941

*Q#2: How did you get into anthropology/archaeology and specifically that of Easter Island? What triggered your interest?*

As a freshman at the University of Kansas in 1959 I took my introductory anthropology course from Carlyle S. Smith (only 3 years after his return from Rapa Nui as part of the Norwegian Expedition to Easter Island). "Uncle Carl" showed slides of Easter Island and Pitcairn that created such a vivid picture of such exciting places that I knew I had to someday explore the South Pacific.

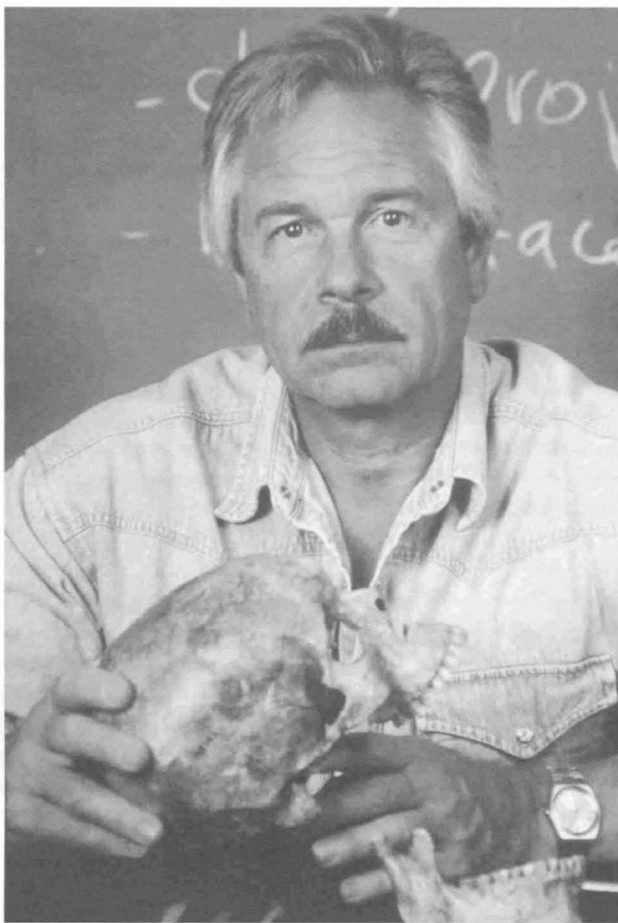
By the next year, William M. Bass, physical anthropologist/forensic anthropologist, came to KU and taught courses in human osteology, human evolution and "races of man." I took all of these exciting classes. By then I guess that the stage was set for my gradual transition from Pre-Med Zoology to Anthropology. Later on, with a new teaching position at University of Wyoming and a close colleague relationship with William Mulloy (also of the Norwegian Expedition, teacher of "Peoples of Oceania" and still active at that time on Rapa Nui) the Easter Island dream started to become a reality.

*Q#3: Who or what do you consider to be your most significant influence (scientific or otherwise) either as a person or a particular work, or series of works?*

The above-mentioned anthropologists and their courses were very significant influences upon my career path, but clearly the basic foundations were laid much earlier in my childhood. My father, a successful physician, was not only well-educated in genetics and Darwinian theory, but could integrate these perspectives into his everyday experiences and into his avocational pursuits (as hunter and naturalist).

He imparted quite effectively to me his deep interest in these fascinating subjects.

My mother, the daughter of an editor-journalist who had seriously pursued both history and archaeology, shared her father's enthusiasm for these disciplines. She read children's books to me about archaeology and "fossil man." These experiences, plus an early 1950s TV show called "What in the World" (where renowned anthropologists were presented artifacts to try to identify) really excited me about the human past, remote cultures and human evolution. Later on, in college, a few good books by C. S. Coon (evolution and race), T. Dobzhansky (genetics and race in society) and Thor Heyerdahl (raw adventure!) also probably helped to seal my fate!



Dr George Gill contemplates one of his favorite objects.

*Q#4: What theory or project of yours turned out to be either different from what you expected, or surprised you?*

My first field project of my career turned out to be so much more exciting and productive than I had ever imagined that I still cannot sometimes believe the pure thrill of those days in the field or the amount of excellent skeletal data produced (which I'm still trying to analyze and publish).

I was a new graduate student working in tropical coastal West Mexico (1968) deep in the mangrove swamps, exploring various kinds of archaeological sites. This was all part of a SUNY-Buffalo summer field project. We encountered previously undiscovered Toltec Period burial mounds. I eventually emerged with over 245 well-preserved burials, exotic artifacts, and more than enough material for my own doctoral dissertation, plus two Masters theses for my first two graduate students. What

I originally had thought might be a two-month summer project ended up a seven-year long multidisciplinary project spanning my graduate school years and my first three years as a professional!

*Q#5: What was your best "Eureka" moment?*

Besides a couple of forensic cases that helped solve some troubling homicide cases with just a few key cranial fragments, I did once have a "Eureka" moment in a case of a very ancient skeleton. It was a well-preserved skeleton from an Archaic site in central Nebraska, sent to me to describe.

My student (Scott J. Baker) and I were struck by the large number of "Caucasoid" skeletal traits on this skeleton and asked them if it could have been a recent intrusive burial (such as a French trapper or other pioneer) into an ancient stratum. They said no, that the context was good and then ran another date. It came out earlier than the first Archaic date! So, Baker and I concluded that, "Eureka," some ancient North American populations may have been much less "Mongoloid" in skeletal structure than the later American Indians!

Within a couple of years after our report came Steele and Powell's classic study on all available Paleoindian skeletons, saying that very same thing. This was followed soon thereafter by Spirit Cave Man, Kennewick Man, and others showing the same peculiar deviation from later American Indians (including several "different looking" early South American skeletons). So now the entire "Peopling of the Americans" traditional view is under reconsideration, expansion and/or revision.

*Q#6: What do you hope to accomplish on Easter Island in the future?*

My skeletal recovery, curation and osteological data retrieval on Easter Island was concluded in 2002 but we are just now getting well into the analysis of data. We (Gill, Owsley, Stefan, Chapman, Furgeson, Clow and Baker) have already provided insights from bone data into Rapa Nui skeletal biology, origins and relationships, intra-island tribal/lineage endogamy and marriage patterns, and Late Period warfare, disease and injury. We hope to soon provide additional information on all four of these topics of interest.

*Q#7: What are you currently reading?*

Mostly books on evolutionary psychology and behavioral ecology to get my mind off of bones!

*Q#8: Publications?*

The most exciting publication in process is a book just submitted this month, *Skeletal Biology and Bio-archaeology of the Northwestern Plains* (University of Utah Press). It is a culmination of 35 years of osteological research in the Wyoming-Montana area with 19 chapters on pathology and injury, skeletal biology and bio-archaeology by mostly my former students and me. My co-editor, Rick Weathermon, is also one of my former students. Following the upcoming 2007 Rapa Nui conference at Gotland University, our osteology team (Gill, Owsley, Stefan, Chapman, Furgeson, Clow, and Baker) are planning a similar volume covering Easter Island human osteology.

A few publications that have stirred recent research activity or professional or public interest are:

- Gill, George W. 1976. Two Mummies From the Pitchfork Rock Shelter in Northwestern Wyoming. *Plains Anthropologist* 21(74):301-310. [Featured in *No Bone Unturned* (2004) by Jeff Benedict]
- Gill, George W., John W. Fisher and George M. Ziemens. 1984. A Pioneer Burial Near the Historic Bordeaux Trading Post. *Plains Anthropologist* 29(105):229-238. [Featured on Discovery Channel's *Mummy Autopsy*, March 2005, and in *Human Osteology* (2000) by Tim White]
- Gill, George W., Susan S. Hughes, Suzanne M. Bennett and B. Miles Gilbert, 1988. Racial Identification from the Midfacial Skeleton with Special Reference to American Indians and Whites. *Journal of Forensic Sciences* 33 (1):92-99.
- Gill, George W. and Stanley Rhine (eds.) 1990. *Skeletal Attribution of Race: Methods for Forensic Anthropology*. Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, Anthropological Papers No. 4, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque. [Reprinted 2004]
- Gill, George W. 1994. Skeletal Injuries of Pioneers. *Skeletal Biology in the Great Plains*. D. W. Owsley and R. L. Jantz, eds. :159-172. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Gill, George W. 1998. Craniofacial Criteria in the Skeletal Attribution of Race. *Forensic Osteology*, K. J. Reichs, ed. Second edition. Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas.
- Gill, George W. 1998. The Beauty of Race and Races. *Anthropology Newsletter* 39(3):1 and 4-5. [Reprinted in 2005 in *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Issues in Anthropology* by K. Endicott and R. L. Welsch.]
- Gill, George W. 2001. Racial Variation in the Proximal and Distal Femur: Heritability and Forensic Utility. *Journal of Forensic Sciences* 46(4):791-799.
- Gill, George W. 2001. Basic Skeletal Morphology of Easter Island and East Polynesia, with Paleoindian Parallels and Contrasts. *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Easter Island and the Pacific*, C. M. Stevenson, G. Lee and F. J. Morin, eds. :447-456. Los Osos, California: Easter Island Foundation.
- Wolpoff, Milford, H. Bruce Mannheim, Alan Mann, John Hawks, Rachel Caspari, Karen R. Rosenberg, David W. Frayer, George W. Gill and Geoffrey Clark, 2004. Why Not the Neanderthals? *World Archaeology* 36(4):527-546.
- Gill, George W. 2006. Does Race Exist? A Proponent's Perspective. *Annual Editions: Physical Anthropology* 06/07. E. Angeloni, ed. Fifteenth edition. Dubuque, Iowa: McGraw Hill.